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I. ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

On 7 May 1996, at its 221st meeting, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People elected the members of its Bureau and adopted the programme of work for 1996. The programme of work, as contained in document A/AC.183/1996/CRP.1 dated 13 March 1996, is reproduced below:

I. MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

1. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for 1996 is contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A, B and C of 15 December 1995, the relevant parts of which are paragraphs 2 to 6 of resolution 50/84 A, paragraphs 2 and 3 of resolution 50/84 B, and paragraphs 2 and 3 of resolution 50/84 C.

2. In paragraphs 2 to 4 of resolution 50/84 A, the General Assembly considered that the Committee could continue to make a valuable and positive contribution to international efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements 1/ and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period, endorsed the Committee's recommendations, 2/ and requested the Committee to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate.

3. In paragraph 5 of the same resolution, the General Assembly authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to make such adjustments in its approved programme of work as it may consider appropriate and necessary in the light of developments, to give special emphasis to the need to mobilize support and assistance for the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session and thereafter.

4. In paragraph 6 of the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in their contribution towards heightening international awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine and promoting support and assistance to meet the needs of the Palestinian people, and to take the necessary steps to involve additional NGOs in its work.

5. Resolution 50/84 B deals with the work programme of the Division for Palestinian Rights. In paragraph 2, the General Assembly considered that the Division for Palestinian Rights continue to make a useful and constructive contribution through the organization of seminars and meetings of non-governmental organizations, as well as through its research and monitoring activities, the preparation of studies and publications, and the collection and dissemination of information in printed and electronic form on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. In paragraph 3, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources, including the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), and to ensure that it continue to discharge the tasks detailed in the pertinent General Assembly resolutions, in consultation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and under its guidance.

6. Resolution 50/84 C deals with the programme of work of the Department of Public Information. In paragraph 2, the General Assembly considered that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information was very useful in raising the awareness of the international community concerning the complexities of the question and the situation in the Middle East in general, including the achievements of the peace process, and that the programme was contributing effectively to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process. In paragraph 3, it requested the Department of Public Information, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as might be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its

special information programme on the question of Palestine for the biennium 1996-1997, with particular emphasis on public opinion in Europe and North America.

II. PRIORITY ISSUES IN THE COMMITTEE'S PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 1996

7. In the recommendations contained in its report to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, 2/ the Committee welcomed further positive developments in the peace process and expressed its commitment to continue to intensify its support for the Palestinian people and its leadership during the transition process.

8. The Committee reaffirmed that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. As the organ of the General Assembly established to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee's role continued to be useful and necessary during the transitional period and until a satisfactory final settlement is achieved.

9. While remaining firm on this position of principle, the Committee has continued to make adjustments in its approach and programme of work in order to respond to the new realities on the ground and to make a concrete contribution to the attainment of a just peace in the Middle East.

10. In 1996, in accordance with the mandate given to it by the General Assembly, the Committee will continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the effective implementation of the agreements reached between the parties, and will mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Committee will continue to cooperate with Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and organizations of the United Nations system in carrying out its mandate.

11. In order to enhance its effectiveness and achieve optimal utilization of available resources, keeping in mind the financial crisis of the Organization, the Committee will make some additional adjustments in its programme of work, as indicated below.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE AND THE DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

A. Action by the Committee

12. The Committee will continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate. The Committee will also continue to monitor the situation on the ground and draw the attention of the international community to urgent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, requiring international action. The Committee, through its Chairman, will continue to participate in relevant meetings of intergovernmental bodies, as considered necessary.

13. The Committee will seek to expand its contacts with the Palestinian Authority and other institutions, including NGOs, in the areas under its jurisdiction. In particular, the Committee will invite officials from the Authority and other Palestinian personalities to special meetings of the Committee in order to apprise its members and other delegations of the important developments on the ground and the evolving needs of the Palestinian people to be met through international action. The Committee will consider ways and means of developing cooperation with and assistance to Palestinian NGOs, including participation in their meetings by the Committee or the staff of the Division.

14. The Committee also requests the Division for Palestinian Rights to explore, in cooperation with the competent offices of the United Nations Secretariat, the possibility of accommodating three young Palestinian professionals, from the areas under the Palestinian Authority, as interns in the Division with a view to acquiring better knowledge and understanding of the work and objectives of the United Nations. To achieve maximum effectiveness, the Committee requests that the internship be scheduled for a period of four months, in conjunction with the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

15. The Committee is of the view that some of the resources authorized by the General Assembly for the Committee's programme of work can be usefully redeployed towards the above-mentioned activities, within the context of adjustments to its programme, in accordance with the authorization given to the Committee in paragraph 5 of resolution 50/84 A.

16. The Committee is of the view that seminars and NGO meetings convened under its auspices continue to be a useful mechanism for in-depth consideration of the priority issues and intends to refocus and streamline this programme for maximum usefulness, including the possibility of co-sponsoring those meetings with academic institutions, NGOs and others. The Committee will also give consideration to holding an event in the territory under the Palestinian Authority to address aspects of the transition period.

B. Seminars and NGO meetings

17. Provision was made in the current programme budget for seven regional seminars, seven regional NGO symposia, two international NGO meetings and four preparatory NGO meetings to be held during 1996-1997. The Committee has decided to adjust this programme by holding two meetings of consultations with NGOs during the biennium (instead of four preparatory meetings), by combining seminars, symposia and NGO meetings as far as possible and by adjusting their periodicity. It is expected that this streamlining will help sharpen the focus and increase the usefulness of these meetings while reducing overall expenditure. The Committee will also endeavour, in cooperation with prospective host countries and institutions, and the competent Secretariat services, to limit costs for conference facilities, equipment and servicing staff, while still ensuring the success of the meetings.

18. Accordingly, the Committee decided to hold the following meetings in the course of 1996:

- Consultations with representatives of NGO coordinating committees, 1 and 2 February, United Nations Headquarters;

- North American NGO symposium, 24-26 June, United Nations Headquarters;

- Seminar on assistance and economic development, May, Cairo;

- International NGO meeting and European NGO symposium, September (territory under the Palestinian Authority).

19. With regard to the North American seminar which had been held in the past in conjunction with the respective NGO symposium, the Committee decided not to hold this event and to redeploy some of the resources towards enhancing the symposium.

20. The Committee also decided to hold a combined seminar/NGO symposium in the Asian region and to initiate consultations with prospective host countries with a view to beginning preparations for this event.

C. Research, monitoring and publications, including the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

21. The Committee continues to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine, and requests it to continue its programme of publications and the further development of UNISPAL, in consultation with the Committee. The Committee also requests the Division to consider preparing information kits on particular issues, in consultation with the Bureau.

22. In accordance with existing mandates and earlier requests of the Committee, the Division's publications programme in 1996 will include the following:

(a) the monthly bulletin on activities by the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and others on the question of Palestine, containing the texts of all relevant resolutions, statements and decisions;

(b) the periodic bulletin entitled "Developments related to the Middle East peace process", containing information on the peace process and the multilateral negotiations on Middle East regional issues;

(c) the monthly chronological summary of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on press reports and other sources.

23. In addition, the Committee requests the Division, in cooperation with the active coordinating committees of

NGOs, to prepare periodically a flyer containing information on significant NGO activities for the information of the Committee and for communication to the NGO network.

24. The Division will also issue the reports of regional and international meetings, organized under the auspices of the Committee; a special bulletin on the commemoration, in 1995, of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; and a compilation of relevant resolutions, decisions and statements adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council in 1995. The Division will also update, as needed, its information notes on the work of the Committee and the Division, on the NGO programme of the Committee and on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

25. With regard to the preparation of studies on fundamental issues requested by the Committee, it is noted with appreciation that the Division has completed the draft study on Jerusalem, updating and expanding an earlier study issued in 1981. The Division will also continue its work on a draft of the study on Israeli settlements.

26. With regard to UNISPAL, the Committee notes with appreciation that the Division has completed the initial stages of development of the system, with the acquisition of the necessary hardware and software, the establishment of a bulletin board system (BBS), the introduction of Lotus Notes, and the inclusion in the system of a comprehensive collection of current United Nations documents, as well as some other documentation. The Committee also notes the establishment of a database of accredited NGOs and the various other initiatives of the Division in making full use of this electronic facility in its monitoring, research and other activities. While pleased with these developments, the Committee notes that the initial mandate for UNISPAL was given by the General Assembly in 1991 and that it is now urgent to proceed with the full and effective implementation of the system.

27. The Committee notes, in particular, that because of the long history of the question of Palestine, the vast majority of important documents to be included in UNISPAL predate the electronic era and therefore need to be converted into a suitable electronic format. The Division has estimated that at least 25,000 pages of such documents will need to be so converted in order to cover the most important aspects of the issue. The Committee also notes that optical scanning, editing and formatting of documents is a very labour-intensive, time-consuming and highly technical exercise and that the staff of the Division is already involved full-time in carrying out the various aspects of its programme of work, as well as the work needed for identifying and photocopying documents for electronic conversion, so that this additional task cannot be performed by the Division efficiently. The Committee accordingly considers that it would be more cost-effective and efficient for the Organization to contract this work on the outside and requests the Secretary-General to authorize the necessary expenditure in this regard by utilizing sections of the Division's budget specifically earmarked for UNISPAL and publications. In this respect, the Committee notes that it will not request translation of publications into languages other than the official languages of the United Nations, nor the services of consultants, and that therefore those resources could be redeployed towards the UNISPAL scanning project.

28. The Committee also recalls that one of the main purposes of UNISPAL was to provide information for the use of members of the Committee, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others active on the question of Palestine. Noting that United Nations security regulations barring access to the local area network (LAN) by outsiders negate this intent, the Committee requests the Division to urgently develop modalities for ensuring access by permanent missions and other outside users to UNISPAL, such as by establishing a public-access replica separate from UNISPAL, and through a site on the Internet, similar to those already established by various United Nations entities.

D. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

29. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People will be observed on Friday, 29 November 1996. It is envisaged that the observance will take place at Headquarters, at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, and elsewhere in accordance with established practice.

30. The Committee has decided, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, to prepare a special programme for the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in 1996, including an exhibit to be displayed at United Nations Headquarters during the week of 29 November to 6 December 1996, as well as hosting a reception and organizing other activities as appropriate.

Notes

1/ A/48/486-S/6560, annex.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/50/35), paras. 115 - 124.

II. UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE HELD AT CAIRO FROM 21 TO 23 MAY

The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People was convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in accordance with its mandate to promote international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Seminar was held at Cairo from 21 to 23 May 1996.

The Committee was represented by a delegation comprising Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman, Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman, Mr. Joseph Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur, Mr. Pedro Nuñez Mosquera (Cuba), and Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine). The officers of the Committee served as officers of the Seminar in their respective capacities.

The Seminar was attended by some 200 participants, among them representatives of 62 Governments and 17 United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations. Twenty-one experts presented papers on various topics for discussion.

At the opening session, a statement was made by Mr. Mohamed Adel El Safty, First Under-Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt. A statement on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations was read out by his representative, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Peter Hansen. Statements were made by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Mr. Zuhdi Nashashibi, the Minister of Finance of the Palestinian Authority and President of the Palestine National Fund; and Mr. Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

The Seminar began with a plenary session on "Building the Palestinian economy - challenges and prospects". Statements were made by representatives of donor countries and other Governments, intergovernmental and national organizations, non-governmental organizations, and organizations and entities of the United Nations system.

Subsequently, four round-table discussions moderated by experts were conducted as follows:

I. International assistance to the Palestinian people: experience and perspectives

Mr. Robert Z. Lawrence, Professor of International Trade, Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East, Harvard University (Moderator)

Mr. Odin G. Knudsen, Representative of the World Bank in the West Bank and Gaza

Ms. Ghania Malhees, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Palestinian Authority

Mr. Nabil El Sherif, Deputy Managing Director of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR), Gaza, and Director of the Palestinian Water Authority

Mr. Henry Siegman, Director, US/Middle East Project and Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York

Mr. Geoffrey Haley, Aid Coordinator for Technical Assistance, Office of the European Union, Jerusalem

II. Trade sector

Mr. James S. Duesenberry, Professor, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (Moderator)

Mr. Robert Z. Lawrence, Professor of International Trade, Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East, Harvard University

Mr. Samir Huleileh, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Palestinian Authority

Mr. Hanspeter Tschäni, Senior Policy Expert, Swiss Trade Initiative for the Middle East and North Africa (STIMENA)

Mr. Jean-Michel Dumont, Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation

Mr. Taha Abdel Aleem, Deputy Director, Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo

Mr. Yousef Mahmoud Najem, Palestine Chamber of Commerce, Gaza

III. The role of the financial institutions

Mr. Hanspeter Tschäni, Senior Policy Expert, STIMENA (Moderator)

Mr. Ahmad Mashal, Director, Research Department, Palestinian Monetary Authority

Mr. James S. Duesenberry, Professor, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmed Al Takruri, Deputy Regional Manager, Cairo-Amman Bank, West Bank

Mr. Said Hammoud, Secretary of the Founding Committee of Salam International Investment

IV. The housing sector

Mr. Khalid Abdel Shafie, Head, UNDP Office, Gaza (Moderator)

Mr. Marwan Abdul Hamid, Assistant Deputy Minister of Housing and Public Works, Palestinian Authority

Mr. James Ryan, Chairman, Shahrazad Homes

Mr. Ali Sha'at, Assistant Deputy Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority

Mr. Walid Hasna, Chief Engineer, UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People

Mr. Milad Hanna, former Chairman of the Committee on Housing and Construction, Egyptian Parliament

Mr. Mohamed M. Ziara, Director-General, Ministry of Housing and Public Works, Palestinian Authority

At the close of the Seminar, statements were made by the representatives of Egypt and Palestine and by the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

At the request of the Committee Chairman, the final report of the Seminar has been issued in document A/51/166-E/1996/67 for distribution to all members of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. A more comprehensive version of the report will also be issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

III. SECRETARY-GENERAL MEETS YASSER ARAFAT

On 2 May 1996, Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), met the Secretary-General. The same day, the following statement was issued by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General (press release SG/SM/5975).

"During their working luncheon today [2 May 1996], the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, discussed current developments in the Middle East, including the forthcoming Israeli-Palestinian 'final status' talks and the situation in Lebanon following the cease-fire agreement.

"Chairman Arafat called for an enhanced United Nations presence in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem and for a greater United Nations role in the peace process. He praised the work of the United Nations programmes and agencies in the area, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. Referring to the serious deterioration of the Palestinian economy, he called on these programmes to do even more, and for the donors to expedite their financial contributions. The Secretary-General assured him that the United Nations would continue to assist the Palestinian people in every possible way.

"The Secretary-General and Chairman Arafat agreed to remain in close contact regarding the peace process, and to reinforce United Nations-Palestinian relations."

IV. ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL ISSUES REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF WORKERS OF THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES

The Director-General of the International Labour Office has issued a report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, as an appendix to the Director-General's annual report to the 83rd session of the International Labour Conference, to be held from 4 to 20 June at Geneva (CONFREP/112-4 E96). The report centres on institution-building and labour relations, the employment problem and technical cooperation. It concludes that Palestinians continue to live in poor conditions with declining job opportunities and that the economic consequences of the closure of the territories in 1996 were disastrous and considerably aggravated by the unprecedented closure of all the villages in the West Bank, which prevented workers from working in the territories themselves.

V. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION

1. News from Within is a newsletter of the Alternative Information Centre, P.O. Box 31417, Jerusalem (Fax 972 2 253151). Issue No. 5 (May 1996) contains an editorial on the need to open Hebron University; an article by Jan De Jong which reviews options advanced by Palestinian officials aiming to "save" Arab Jerusalem; articles on the change in the PLO Covenant, on the Palestinian trade unions, and on the Palestinian Authority's new intelligence services; and an interview with Azmi Bishara on cultural autonomy for Palestinian-Arabs in Israel.

2. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights publishes weekly updates entitled "Report by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights on the total closure imposed by Israel on the Occupied Territories". The updates are available from P.O. Box 1204, Gaza (Fax 07 824776/825893). Closure Update No. 9 of 16 May 1996 includes information on the obstruction of activities of the Palestinian Council; on the death of an elderly patient due to Israel's refusal to permit travel to Jordan; on the fact that only 30 per cent of the pre-closure workforce is allowed to return to work in Israel; on restrictions on visiting relatives in prison; and on confiscation of Palestinian land by Israeli forces. Closure Update No. 10 of 31 May 1996 includes background information on the closure; on Israeli denial of permission to travel for urgent medical attention; and on the banning of commercial transactions with Gaza.

3. Health Care Under Siege, published by the Health Development Information Project of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC), Jerusalem (P.O. Box 51483, Jerusalem; fax 02 83 06 79), was released in March 1996. The report contains information on the effects of the closure of the occupied territories on the health of Palestinians. It includes details

on the restrictions of movements of medical personnel; denial of access to medical care; halting of vaccination programmes; low pharmaceutical and oxygen supplies; and effects on emergency medical services.

4 I P C R I (Israel/Palestine Centre for Research and Information, is a Palestinian-Israeli think tank (P.O. Box 51358, East Jerusalem 91513, via Israel, fax 972 2 274 383, Internet http://www.PIRSONET.CO/IL/IPCRI/) that issues publications via Internet. One issue contains information on the background and rationale of the establishment of the I.P.C.R.I. and on its membership and goals. Another issue, entitled "Israeli and Palestinian public opinion on the future of Jerusalem", contains the results of two parallel public opinion polls (Israel and West Bank/Gaza/East Jerusalem) on the future of Jerusalem.